

Applauds Creation of Independent Funds To Compensate Victims, Businesses, Rig Workers

Friends,

Citizens of the Gulf Coast have been devastated by the tragic oil spill, people have lost their lives, and businesses will be shut down. British Petroleum (BP), not taxpayers, should be held accountable for the widespread damage their irresponsible actions have caused to individuals and businesses along the Gulf Coast.

That is why I applaud the creation of the \$20 billion independent BP fund to compensate Gulf Coast victims harmed by this disaster and strongly disagree with anyone who would defend BP's actions or say they are owed an apology for this fund. It is BP that owes the American people an apology for their negligence, and a compensation fund to help victims is the least they should do.

I also support the additional \$100 million fund, also paid for by BP, to compensate oil rig workers displaced by this disaster and the Administration's moratorium on deepwater drilling. I also strongly believe we need to lift the current cap on economic damages that companies must pay because it is outdated and insufficient to address disasters of this magnitude. Last week I joined other members of Congress in sending a letter urging BP to suspend billions in dividend

payments until compensation and clean-up costs for the Gulf have been covered. On Wednesday, BP finally agreed to that request, which is the right thing to do for the people of the Gulf Coast.

Congressional hearings are an important way to hold BP accountable and protect the American people. This week, hearings have exposed disaster emergency response plans for BP and other major oil companies as being woefully inadequate, and in some cases, downright ridiculous. During testimony in Congress, the public has learned that some oil companies' current emergency response plans for the Gulf were written by the same industry consultant who passed away 5 years ago and called for the protection of walruses and sea lions. Of course, there are no walruses or sea lions in the Gulf of Mexico. As a result of the ongoing hearings, we will put immediate pressure on deepwater oil companies to put in place improved emergency plans.

It is clear to most Americans and me, that BP has been negligent and dishonest throughout this crisis and has cut corners on safety that led to this unprecedented disaster in the first place, which could cost the Gulf Coast millions of jobs and billions of dollars in economic output. They must not only be held accountable; we must ensure that the proper safety precautions and standards are being followed by BP and all oil companies operating in the Gulf.

Though I am encouraged by the steps taken this week to hold BP accountable, it is also clear that the Administration reacted too slowly to this crisis and too often deferred to BP on major decisions.

I am a strong proponent of increased domestic production of energy, and I support and have voted for expanded offshore drilling. I do not support the Obama Administration's 6-month moratorium on producing deepwater wells, and I met with Interior Secretary Ken Salazar to try to change that moratorium and to also ensure that shallow water wells are not impacted by a slowdown in the regulatory process.

What several industry executives have said makes sense, and I support, is a short-term halt to new exploratory deep water wells until safety standards can be agreed upon to prevent another BP-type tragedy. I support the recently stepped up offshore inspection process but disagree with the Administration applying the moratorium to already producing wells.

It would be irresponsible to ignore BP's mistakes and not immediately put those lessons learned into effect, because another similar disaster would put at risk more lives, millions of jobs and the environment along the Gulf Coast and the entire future of the offshore oil industry.

Going forward, we must continue to focus our efforts on containing the damage to protect our Gulf Coast residents and their way of life, and we must put in place the necessary safeguards to prevent a tragedy like this from ever happening again.

It may take years, but we should not rest until the Gulf Coast and its citizens are made whole

again.

Sincerely,

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